

# ***World made of steel, made of stone***

**Honey Brown, Josephine Jelicich, Deborah Rundle,**

**Isabel Wadeson-Lee, Daegan Wells**

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## **A response by Isla Reeves**

*World made of steel, made of stone* has made itself at home. In this whare, these works don't hang in solitude but talk openly between themselves, one white wall to another, an "I know where you came from" kinda thing. They speak about the process of labour, and the labour of process, like aunties in circle, in reflection. Each work has cut their own path to the here and now, but it's all parallel. They tell me about time, people, place, language, bodies. *World made of steel, made of stone* has made room for all of us.

This exhibition, seen through a Pākehā lens, is an open discussion on the history of tools, practice, and good hard work. Through a tirohanga Māori, though, this exhibition is a kōrero about whakapapa; about connection between generations, the work which we do with our bodies, and our ability to reflect upon what has passed. Like a web, each artist has spun their history into a physical piece, and each piece links again to the others, across the room, along the walls. In all works, I see a common thread: mauri realised.

*World made of steel, made of stone* is a testament to time and to people. In Honey Brown's work, "*Rēwena is...*", a mother and father teach their child how to make bread, a zui-style wānanga, ā-ipurangi. Daegan Wells' felted works pay homage to the women of elder generations who taught him the craft, while Deborah Rundle uses glass and text from a different era to tell a new, reflective tale. Isabel Wadeson-Lee lets old chains and new tech collide with the purpose of giving us language, an act that in itself, is timeless. Josephine Jelicich reminds us that aluminium can be layered, an actual shining example of the material's ability to do more than just shelter us. The whakapapa of these works in unison is a pā harakeke, it is remembering the impermanence of time, it is honouring that which was, that which brought us here.

Not only does this exhibition teach me about time, and people, but of place as well. As a viewer, I'm reminded that that which is physically present has roots in worlds and lives that I might otherwise never come to know. Much of *World made of steel,*

*made of stone* is made from the high country and its materials; wool, aluminium, glass, stones, chain. Wells' work brings north to Ōtautahi the wairua of the rural southwest, the end of everywhere, and the aluminium smelter at Tiwai Point. Rundle's work transports us across seas instead of maunga, to a second-hand market in Barcelona, the origin of the glass she presents in this exhibition. Brown's work comments not only on place, but the division that place can create; division in physical location, and division in culture and its practices. The internet is the location here, but it's telling me about whenua, and I acknowledge that gap—it is within me as well. The works in this room take me inside them, but also outside; all the way to the farm, to Spain, to tūrangawaewae in their many forms.

Language, too, is part of the whakapapa in *World made of steel, made of stone*. The time, people and places that it references are all cut finely with words, because there is language in the landscapes they provide. Wadeson-Lee has me like a child at the TV, a little bit engrossed. The fixed truths within the dictionary on-screen, and the starkness of the chains that bind them contrast with the fallibility of technological displays. Rundle's work brings back writing from 1983, from *DykeNews*, and yet the sentiment remains. Brown shows me what I already know; the face of public language, hyper-accessible, sometimes misread, and the thread of communication in lockdown-love. The whakapapa here is of letters, definitions, poetry, and the act of naming things to make them all the more real.

Another link between these works is that which is most plainly obvious: the physicality, the labour. I see in each of the works the act of embodied creation; the act of bringing what you will to the table, but giving it the flexibility to shift in meaning, shape, and purpose. Jelichich's work talks about capitalism within production, and the necessity of being intuitive when working with materials so steeped in the history of labour. Wells too uses his work to provide a new meaning to an ancient process, leaving behind the bruteness, the masculinity so firmly associated with rural life and the act of creating. The materials within his works and others have played a key role in the upkeep of Aotearoa's post-colonial economy, but what would happen if we left these politics behind and remained with the material itself, and just that. In their purest forms, wool, aluminium and glass are not monetised; they are what has warmed us, helped us, and housed us. And where will they take us next?

In all, it is the coming together of these many elements, these strands of whakapapa, that create dynamism in this *World made of steel, made of stone*. It is the pushing and pulling of these many concepts, and their many contexts, that unite the works in one light. Even in the discomfort—the bits that feel different or isolated from the rest—we can sit with that and ask questions, listen carefully, and feel a part of their evolving conversation. Modern technology or hands-on practice? To weld or to scroll? Image or text? Practice or aesthetic? Tipuna or today?

Undeniably, this show is about hands. About the making of, and the coming from. About tangible creation. A big kōrero. Each of the artists has delivered an individual whakaaro, but also united front: this is a process, a whakapapa, a timeline. *World made of steel, made of stone* has made a name for herself, and a very strong impression.

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